

Diocese of Hallam

Virtual Pilgrimage Blog

Wednesday 1st July 2020

Today we reflect on the theme of Water.

Wednesday morning in Lourdes would usually see our pilgrimage join thousands of other pilgrims (normally 7,000 to 8,000) at the International Mass in St. Pius X (Underground) Basilica.

The International Mass, at its best, can be a wonderful representation of the Universal Church, gathered as one at this celebration of the Eucharist. Some parts have changed over the years, not always for the better, but I still love it and it isn't easy trying to accommodate so many different language groups present. The TV screens around the Basilica help us.



We try to get pilgrims to the Underground Basilica early, so that we can position pilgrims in wheelchairs together, in the area allocated to us by the Sanctuary.

Phil Carter and Colette Sharp and our team of Helpers help enormously with this, and our doctors and nurses keep a watching eye throughout. The Mass itself lasts around 1h 20m but with the need to get there in good time, and the welcome, we are in the Basilica for just under 2 hours.

Hallam Youth generally sit in the same area each year - you can't miss the sea of yellow - and sometimes we are able to involve some of them in the Procession of Gifts.

There are usually around a dozen Bishops and 100-150 priests at the International Mass.

Here is a link to the International Mass that we attended this time last year.

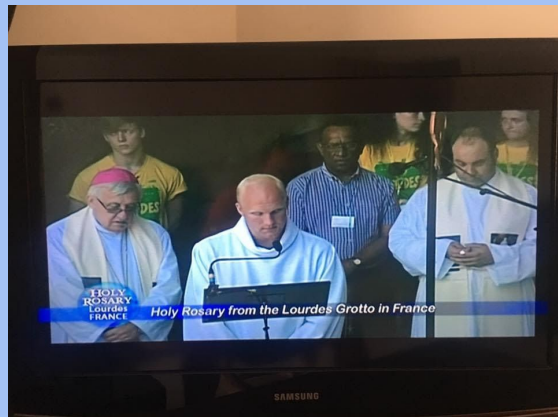
[International Mass 3rd July 2019](#)

If you were there, see if you can spot yourself. If you haven't been to Lourdes it is worth watching to see the international dimension. The Celebrant was the Archbishop of Miami, USA so the homily, was in English rather than Italian or Spanish.

At the end of Mass last year, there was a procession to the Grotto, behind the relics of St. Bernadette, for the Angelus. Bishop Ralph and Bishop John led the way.



During our Virtual Pilgrimage, instead of an International Mass we continue our journey around the Diocese and travel to Wombwell where Fr. Declan Brett will celebrate **Mass with the theme of Water** at **10.00am** from Corpus Christi parish, Dearne Valley.



Bishop Ralph, Fr. Craig Fitzpatrick & Hallam Youth at the Rosary

In “normal” times the Rosary is prayed at the Grotto twice a week in English. We’ve taken part the last few years on Wednesday afternoon. It would have been Bishop Ralph leading it if we had been in Lourdes, as he has before, with other pilgrims.

For our Virtual Pilgrimage we join the livestream from the Sanctuary (bear with us if it is a slightly delayed start) for **Rosary at the Grotto at 2.00pm** UK time led by one of the English speaking Chaplains. Mgr. Xavier d’Arodes, the Vice-Rector who sent us the message at the start of the week, cannot be there but has sent a message saying he continues to pray for us. He has been very supportive of our Virtual Pilgrimage, and indeed of our actual pilgrimage, and all UK pilgrimages, since he arrived in Lourdes.

Later on Wednesday afternoon, we would normally take part, as a Diocese, in the Blessed Sacrament Procession. This takes place every afternoon at 5.00pm. Depending on the weather, it either starts on the Prairie and we process around the

Esplanade into the Underground Basilica, or the whole procession takes place in the Underground Basilica. Often when we are in Lourdes it is the latter. Fortunately, the last few years that wasn’t due to rain, but due to the very hot weather.

A number of pilgrimages participate in the Procession each day. Our friends from the Diocese of Paisley, Scotland, would probably have been there with us, together with some Spanish and Italian pilgrimages.



Bishop Ralph carrying the Blessed Sacrament in the Procession

The Sanctuary determine who presides, and carries the Blessed Sacrament, but it is almost always a Bishop.

One of my abiding memories of Lourdes is from 25 years ago when Fr. Gerry Harney, (our Pilgrimage Director from 1980 to 2006) was asked to carry the Blessed Sacrament in the Procession. He told me afterwards that it was a memory he would treasure for the rest of his life.



Fr. Gerry Harney carrying the Blessed Sacrament in 1995

Lourdes is famous as a place of healing. Of the 70 officially recognised miracles, over the last 162 years, many have involved Lourdes water (but not all of them involved the Baths). A very significant number of the recognised miracles, however, were cures that took place at the Blessed Sacrament Procession. This is why, traditionally, a small group of doctors walk behind the presiding Bishop near the end, as he carries the Blessed Sacrament and blesses all present.

You can watch the Blessed Sacrament Procession that took place this time last year through this link:-

[Blessed Sacrament Procession 2019](#)

Wednesday is also, usually, the day that our pilgrims visit the Baths. Last year, we were unable to do that, and so instead we held a Water Liturgy for the whole pilgrimage.

A visit to the Baths can be a very powerful experience. There is, however, nothing magical about Lourdes water itself - numerous tests have shown it to be natural spring water. It is God who heals.

Our Lady's request to St. Bernadette in the 9th Apparition was actually to "*Go, wash at the Spring*". So, during the Liturgy last year we filled jugs with Lourdes water from the taps, and everyone was invited to make a "gesture" with water, e.g. washing their hands or face.



Helpers collected jugs filled with Lourdes Water

A Helper poured Lourdes water from the jug into a bowl, held by a Hallam Youth, and all 450 of us made some form of gesture within this Service. It was a very moving liturgy.



A pilgrim making a gesture with water, aided by a Helper & Youth

For our Virtual Pilgrimage, Bishop John will lead us in a **Water Liturgy at 7.00pm** **In preparation, he suggests that you have a bowl of water (tap water) to hand for the Blessing of Water that will take place during the Service.** This service is different to the gesture with Lourdes water that we made on the pilgrimage last year, but during the Service there will be a chance to recall that gesture. Please note, the liturgy this year does not involve Lourdes water so you don't need any.

Water is a reminder of our baptism. **During our Water Liturgy this evening, Bishop Ralph will invite us all to renew our Baptismal Promises.** Our response to each question will appear on the video in blue text.

Finally, Wednesday evening is normally our social night in the Hotel Alba, hosted by Hallam Youth. If you are in the Facebook Group, and want to join us for a Virtual social night (incl. music by James Tucker, Pete Loftus and Myles Doran from Hallam Youth) look out for the links on the Group. It will start after the Water Liturgy.

Alex Prior
Pilgrimage Director